

The Builder.

No. 6033.

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 1847.



If we had not been often disappointed in an anticipation equally well grounded, we should say that the result of the Army and Navy Club Competition will do much towards a reform of the present system. But we have lost all hope of such a desirable consummation.

"Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not—
Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

said Byron, and after him O'Connell. Reform must be brought about by the architects themselves, and as long as members of the profession can be found, so lost to a proper sense of the dignity of their calling as to respond to invitations of the most insulting character (of course we do not now refer to those of the club in question), take the chance of accident, influence, and chicanery, work for any thing,—nothing,—so long, we fear, things will remain just as they now are. While architects will submit designs for a Literary Institution, to an obviously incompetent tribunal, for an offered five pounds five shillings, as in the Ipswich affair, denounced by us some time ago in less measured terms than we generally use, little improvement is to be looked for. Architects must themselves arrange the leading terms of competitions, and resolutely decline participating in those otherwise conducted; architects must themselves avoid the exercise of underhand influence, must themselves show integrity and high feeling; and further, refuse to compete or co-operate with those proved guilty of want of these qualities.

For some years, architects have been doing their utmost to convince the public that they consider their own productions of no value, and now they are surprised to find that the public are precisely of that same opinion. What can be had for nothing is generally thought to be worth nothing; and architects' designs, in the minds of large numbers of persons, serve as an illustration of the correctness of this belief.

So far from making any addition to the usual payment to architects, in return for the chance of having done the work for nothing, committees are constantly found offering sums, the most insignificant, quite inadequate to the skill and labour required, if even there were no risk attached. Without again alluding to the Ipswich case and others similarly preposterous, we may point in illustration, to an advertisement in our paper of the 24th ult., for plans for a general hospital at Cheltenham, which is to contain from sixty to one hundred beds, with necessary accommodation for officers and servants, and to be built substantially, at a cost not exceeding 5,000*l*. The honorarium offered to the successful competitor is 60*l*., and, "in consideration of that sum, he will be required to furnish an estimate, specification, and working drawings, necessary for the effectual carrying out of the above plan."—In consideration of that sum, which is not one-half of what would be a fair charge for the work required, if an architect were, without risk, commissioned to execute it. A detailed estimate, if he employed

a surveyor to make it, would cost him more than the money!

If a man went into Westminster Hall and offered two guineas in competition to barristers, for the performance of some ordinary service, for which the recognised fee was four, how would he be received? Or, if he wrote to a number of hat-makers, for example, inviting them to submit for his inspection some twenty-shilling hats, and offering to give ten shillings for the best one amongst them, how many applicants would he have? The 22nd of May, the day on which these hospital designs are to be delivered, will show how differently architects and hat-makers view the same thing.

We are not willing to oppose architectural competitions altogether. They might be made to present the means of advancement to unknown and struggling merit, in a profession singularly wanting in such opportunities; and we are, therefore, much more anxious to see competitions properly conducted than to find them abandoned. We have laboured for this for some years past, and our pages contain a large number of remarks, exposures, and suggestions, in connection with the subject.

A competent tribunal (equipped with, or we may say, proceeding from, due consideration of the value of an architect's labours) is the great point to be achieved. And it is under this head alone that we are at issue with the Army and Navy Club.

We attribute to the committee, as a body, no trickery, unfairness, or ungentlemanly feeling. As we have already said, they probably made the selection with an anxiety to do justice; but they were not competent, and could not be expected to be competent to perform the duty. If they had called in proper professional assistance, they would not merely have avoided much reproach, trouble, and annoyance, but have entitled themselves to the thanks of the profession for the manner in which the whole matter was conducted.

We have received a number of letters complaining that the sections submitted by the competitors, in compliance with the instructions issued, and which are of course all-important in forming a judgment on the relative merits of the plans, were not exhibited with the other drawings, excepting those appertaining to the selected designs: contemporaries, also, dwell loudly on the same fact. We need scarcely say that the absence of sections was not overlooked by us, or unregretted; we were positively assured however, on inquiry, and believe the assurance, that all the sections were examined by the committee (whether they understood them is another matter), and were left open for examination by the members until after the selection was made, when they were removed for safety, with the exceptions already mentioned, as there was not space on the walls to receive them.

As we foresaw must be the case, the committee will not adopt either of the selected designs, nor can they amalgamate them. The premiums will be paid to the authors of them, and then, the club having obtained additional ground, a fresh competition will be invited on the part of the six architects whose designs received the greatest number of votes, including of course the two rewarded competitors. No premium will be given, but the author of the selected design will be employed to carry out his plan; and the committee have determined on taking professional opinion before coming to a decision.

On another page in the present number, will be found some useful information as to the size of rooms in existing club-houses.

THE ARCHITECTURAL ROOM AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

RESUMING our notice of the architectural drawings in the present exhibition, we are still surprised to find how inadequately the progress of the art during the past year, is represented. We have not a single drawing of any part of the Houses of Parliament, of the British Museum, the New Board of Trade, the additions to Buckingham Palace, or the interior of Covent Garden Theatre. The last mentioned would have made an excellent subject,—having the advantage of colour, in which our own illustration was necessarily deficient. There is this year, not even one contribution by an academician, and comparatively few drawings of the churches in progress or lately completed. One design for the Army and Navy Club, noticed in our last number, is the only indication of this recent excitement in the architectural world. Yet, as usual, a considerable amount of space is occupied by views of old buildings, and also by designs never intended to be carried into execution. It is difficult to understand, why, year after year, this branch of the Royal Academy should present so unsatisfactory an aspect. But, in the absence of any knowledge, this season, of the number or quality of the rejected works, the solution most probable, is, that architects are too much dissatisfied with the management of this department, to incur the labour of production, on the chance of a bad place, or that of rejection. We have frequently seen admirable drawings, and of works in course of execution, which had been rejected, indeed, the occurrence is notoriously frequent. To prepare an elaborate perspective view requires an expenditure of time, which few architects can themselves readily devote to such an object, but were there any probability of the labour being properly appreciated, the result would be very different. At present, the great objects of attraction are the large rooms, where are the oil paintings and the new fashions, and with most visitors, the dinner hour arrives ere either architecture or sculpture are thought of. In an exhibition devoted entirely to architecture, with only two or three lines of drawings, the case would be very different, and considering that comparatively few now do any thing more than enter the architectural room, whilst the examination of a large proportion of these would be just as well dispensed with, we cannot but think, that architects and the art would be gainers by the change. The architectural exhibition would thus stand upon its proper merits; it would be visited for its own object, and could not fail to give a large amount of interest, not only to the general public, but to others more particularly interested in the art. Whether plans, elevations, and sections, and whether views of old buildings, being hung in a distinct room, should be admitted, as well as of those lately, or to be erected, and some other details, would require consideration; but we think the project is well worth the attempt, and the success of the water-colour exhibitions augurs well for it with another class of drawings, in which, pictorial representation alone considered, the amount of talent displayed is in no degree inferior. We are aware that the project has been often suggested, but the present seems a favourable time for reviving it.

Looking at the drawings, we find two designs (1078 and 1287), by M. L. Watson, for the sculpture of the pediment of the Royal Exchange, submitted in the competition which was gained by Mr. Westmacott. They represent "The Proclamation of the Royal Exchange in the presence of Queen Elizabeth," and "England proclaiming universal commerce with all nations." The last is the most successfully treated, yet is perhaps hardly equal to the sculpture on the building. "The proposed new church at Dunsbridge, Cheshire,"—J. Clarke (1083),—will be of the decorated style, with a large west window, and a square tower, to which, we should presume, it were intended to add a spire, if representation did not more frequently exceed than fall short of reality. No. 1684 is a plan showing the position of Dover Court, in relation to Harwich, and the new railway. The view of the new town (1111) has not any very important architectural character: the tower seems intended to group with the design, but is a failure.—Mr. J. Dobbin has mounted a stand which he cannot manage, and we only